



State of Connecticut

Latino and Puerto Rican

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Testimony of Dr. Ruby Corby O'Neill regarding H.B. No. 6824 "An Act Concerning the State Budget for the Biennium ending June Thirtieth 2017, and making Appropriations therefor and other provisions related to revenue."

Good evening Sen. Bye, Rep. Walker, and members of the Appropriations Committee.

My name is Dr. Ruby Corby O'Neill and I am a Commissioner on LPRAC.

I am a recently retired tenured Professor of Psychology; I taught Psychology, Research Methods and many social science courses at the undergraduate and graduate level. I've shepherded hundreds of students toward graduation and prepared many to work in the social sciences, human services, and business.

As a member of the Faculty Senate, I participated in university governance at the non-profit and for-profit levels. I was the faculty advisor for several years to the Student Government Association (an invited position); advisor to hundreds of students of various backgrounds, and I've worked in private industry.

This session, you've already heard many people making their pleas on behalf of their agencies, so I won't repeat – too much – what others have said. What I'd like to do is share with you what I've observed and heard over the years as it relates to Latinos and Latinas, which highlights how the "rubber meets the road" at the intersection of society and lived experience.

In the 1990s, while doing the lit review for my doctoral dissertation, I came across a disturbing finding. A 1992 study by AAUW – the American Association of University Women – looked at a nationally representative sample of 2,399 females. AAUW then asked the Academy for Educational Development to review the data and focus primarily on the 290 Latinas from the original sample, aged 9-15 years old. One of the measures was Self-esteem. These were their findings: "(1) an ethnic and racial gap in the self-esteem of girls increases with age; (2) the sense of self-value in the family declines for older Latina adolescents; (3) low academic pride is a factor in the low level of Latina self-esteem; and (4) teachers often neglect the opportunity to positively affect the self-esteem of their female students, especially Latinas. Lowering of aspirations occurs with the lowering of self-esteem experienced by Latina adolescents. Results indicate[d] that Latinas are likely to find less support at home or in school than other young women growing up in U.S. society...Latinas and white girls alternate[d], depending on the self-esteem

measure, as to who has lower self-esteem than African-American girls, but Latinas generally display the sharpest drops between middle and high school in the self-esteem measures. ” (Shortchanging Hispanic Girls. An Analysis of Hispanic Girls in the Greenberg-Lake Survey of Self-Esteem, Education, and Career Aspirations among Adolescent Girls and Boys in the United States. AAUW; Academy for Educational Development, Inc. Washington, D.C June 1992).

Fast forward to 2001: New York Times headline, “A Troubling New Label for Hispanics: ‘Girls Most Likely to Drop Out.’ ” (NYT, March 25, 2001. <http://www.nytimes.com/2001/03/25/us/troubling-label-for-hispanics-girls-most-likely-to-drop-out.html>). The article cites the following:

Carlos Rodriguez, Research Scientist at the non-profit American Institutes for Research: “Too many girls feel there isn’t anything beyond Jennifer Lopez...Among women who come through Ph.D. programs, for example, or the medical profession, or any of the managerial professions, Hispanic representation has not been great. The impact has been the maintenance of stereotypical roles for girls.”

Rossana Rosado, publisher of El Diario-La Prensa Spanish language newspaper said that many Latina girls had a limited number of publicly identifiable role models who defy traditional expectations. “Women are still invisible in corporate structures, and Latinas are even more invisible.”

Vanessa Banc, an 18-year-old Cuban-American: “Some teachers do think Hispanic girls are going to end up pregnant and cooking for some guy. That’s the stereotype...sometimes teachers’ expectations of students can take them in the wrong path because they feel they won’t disappoint anyone by dropping out. It’s what’s expected of them.”

Fast forward to the next century, in the mid-2000s; I have my Ph.D. and I’m a college professor, living in CT. I was at a CVS drug store and noticed a young Latina stocking shelves. I struck up a conversation with her:

Me: “Oh, is this your after-school job?”

She: “No, this is my full-time job. I graduated already.”

Me: “Oh, you graduated high school or college?”

She: (laughs) “High school.”

Me: “Are you planning on going to college?”

She: “No.”

Me: “Why not?”

She: “I didn’t take my SATs.”

Me: “Why not?”

She: “My guidance counselor told me not to bother taking the SATs.”

Fast forward to many months later, I'm at CVS and I see a young Latino stocking shelves and I know the conversation I want to have with him, so I start. When he answers my question about going to college, he said, "My guidance counselor in high school told me I'm not college material."

These low expectations are powerful. And damaging. At worst, they are a form of social engineering. Our Latino youth must learn to cultivate resistance to these low expectations and develop "a belief in self far greater than anyone's disbelief" ("A belief in self far greater than anyone's disbelief": Cultivating resistance among African American female adolescents. Robinson, Tracy; Ward, Janie V. *Women & Therapy*, Vol 11(3-4), 1991, 87-103 http://dx.doi.org/10.1300/J015V11N03_06).

These young people had a sense of resignation about them; they were resigned to their circumstances, resigned to the reality that someone else defined their life story, their future. Such resignation may be a marker for the development of a loss of courage, loss of aspiration, loss of their ability to adapt. I've often told my students: "A successful organism is an adaptive organism." LPRAC offers tools to Latinos and Latinas to develop skills of adaptation so they can become agents on their own behalf, participate fully in social, educational, and a sustainable economic life, and be in charge of their economic well-being.

Fast forward to 2013: Columbia College Chicago. A pilot study of Unfolding Self-Esteem. Adolescent Girls' Self-Esteem and Dance Movement Therapy Intervention (12-2013. *Dance Movement Therapy & Counseling Theses*, Paper 47). Use of the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (1989. Society of Adolescent Self-Image, pp. 325-327. Wesleyan University Press).

"Latina adolescent girls are at the greatest risk for developing depressive symptoms due to culturally instated rigid gender roles and potential discrimination faced during adolescence, which negatively affected self-esteem (Zeiders, Umana-Taylor, & Derlan, 2013. *Trajectories of Depressive Symptoms and Self-Esteem in Latino Youths: Examining the Role of Gender and Perceived Discrimination*. *Developmental Psychology*, 49(5), 951-963).

"Latinas often experience the highest rate of suicide ideation and attempts resulting in medical assistance, HIV infection, and teen pregnancy...they are often more susceptible to domestic violence, substance abuse, [&] major depression" (Rios-Ellis, 2005. *Critical disparities in Latino mental health Transforming research into action*. Washington, D.C.: National Council of La Raza).

LPRAC doesn't just take money from the legislature and spend it; LPRAC also raises money and awards scholarships to Latino & Latina youth. Outreach efforts focus on education, health, economic self-sufficiency, and resistance to discrimination and low expectations. Resistance not only rejects, it actively confronts. And LPRAC is offering tools to help our young people confront negative stereotyping based on gender, race, ethnicity, and other differences that depart from social constructions. They are offering tools to confront blocked opportunity and to unlock potential.

Our Latino and Latina youth are being shortchanged, and when we shortchange them, we shortchange Connecticut. Look at the demographics - these young people are the future of Connecticut.

I'm asking the Committee and the Legislature to consider how cuts to the LPRAC budget could affect the Commission's efforts and effectiveness. I thank you for your continued commitment to and support of LPRAC.

Dr. Ruby Corby O'Neill
Commissioner, LPRAC
March 5, 2015 – Public Hearing